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SEAN KELLY/PENTAGON

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LESSONS FROM THE OCTOBER WAR

ANNCR:

THREE YEARS AGO THIS MONTH (OCT. 6), ON THE HEBREW HOLIDAY, YOM KIPPUR, WAR BROKE OUT IN THE MIDDLE EAST. MUCH HAS SINCE BEEN WRITTEN REGARDING THE MILITARY IMPLICATIONS OF THAT CONFLICT. IN THIS BACKGROUND REPORT, PENTAGON CORRESPONDENT SEAN KELLY EXAMINES THREE VIEWPOINTS: EGYPTIAN, ISRAELI, AND AMERICAN.

VOICE:

"WHAT SORT OF WAR IS IT," SOMEONE ASKED, "THAT STARTS AT TWO O'CLOCK ON A HOLIDAY AFTERNOON?" BUT BOTH THE TIMING AND THE DATE TURNED OUT TO HAVE BEEN CAREFULLY CHOSEN.

IN HIS BOOK ENTITLED ROAD TO RAMADAN, EGYPT'S MOHAMED HEIKAL SAYS THAT MILITARY PLANNERS IN CAIRO FAVORED LAUNCHING THE ATTACK AGAINST ISRAEL IN THE AFTERNOON, BECAUSE THE EGYPTIAN TROOPS COULD THEN CROSS THE SUEZ CANAL WITH THE SUN AT THEIR BACKS --- AND DIRECTLY IN THE EYES OF THE ISRAELIS. THE TIMING WOULD ALSO GIVE THE ATTACKING FORCE SEVERAL HOURS OF DAYLIGHT FOR THE INITIAL CROSSING, FOLLOWED BY NIGHTLONG DARKNESS FOR BRIDGEBUILDING AND THE MOVEMENT OF BATTLE TANKS AND OTHER HEAVY EQUIPMENT ACROSS THE CANAL.

ISRAELI MAJOR GENERAL CHAIM HERZOG (NOW AMBASSADOR TO THE UNITED NATIONS) DESCRIBES THE INTENSITY OF THE ATTACK IN HIS BOOK, THE WAR OF ATONEMENT: "AT H-HOUR TWO HUNDRED AND FORTY EGYPTIAN PLANES CROSSED THE CANAL. SIMULTANEOUSLY, TWO THOUSAND GUNS OPENED UP ALONG THE ENTIRE FRONT: FIELD

ARTILLERY, MEDIUM AND HEAVY ARTILLERY AND MEDIUM AND HEAVY MORTARS. A BRIGADE OF SURFACE-TO-SURFACE MISSILES LAUNCHED ITS WEAPONS. TANKS MOVED UP TO RAMPS PREPARED ON THE (EGYPTIAN) SAND RAMPARTS, DEPRESSED THEIR GUNS, AND FIRED POINTBLANK (ACROSS THE CANAL) AT THE ISRAELI STRONGPOINTS."

IN ALL, WRITES GENERAL HERZOG: "OVER THREE THOUSAND CONCENTRATED TONS OF DESTRUCTION WERE LAUNCHED AGAINST A HANDFUL OF ISRAELI FORTIFICATIONS IN A BARRAGE THAT TURNED THE ENTIRE EAST BANK OF THE SUEZ CANAL INTO AN INFERNO FOR FIFTY-THREE MINUTES."

IN SOME WAYS, THE TIMING OF THE ATTACK ACTUALLY WORKED TO THE ADVANTAGE OF THE ISRAELIS. AMERICAN MILITARY ANALYST EDWARD LUTTWAK, IN A RECENTLY-PUBLISHED BOOK ENTITLED THE ISRAELI ARMY, NOTES THAT "NORMALLY THERE ARE NO BROADCASTS ON YOM KIPPUR, A DAY OF PRAYER AND FASTING. RADIO AND TELEVISION STATIONS ARE SHUT DOWN, AS IS EVERY PUBLIC FACILITY AND EVERY PLACE OF BUSINESS. EVERYONE IS AT HOME OR IN NEARBY SYNAGOGUES; EVEN THE IRRELIGIOUS REFRAIN FROM DRIVING, AND ISRAEL'S USUALLY CROWDED ROADS ARE QUITE EMPTY. IN RETROSPECT," WRITES PROFESSOR LUTTWAK, "THIS WAS TO BE OF CONSIDERABLE MILITARY SIGNIFICANCE: THE ARABS HAD CHOSEN THE ONLY DAY OF THE YEAR IN WHICH ANY READY FORCES COULD DRIVE TO THE FRONT UNIMPEDED BY TRAFFIC, AND THE ONLY DAY IN THE YEAR IN WHICH RESERVISTS COULD UNFAILINGLY BE FOUND AT HOME, OR CLOSE BY."

AS FOR THE PROGRESS OF THE ATTACK, AND THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ISRAELI RESPONSE, THE JUDGMENTS OF THE THREE AUTHORS DIFFER, AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED. BUT BOTH MOHAMMED HEIKAL AND CHAIM HERZOG AGREE THAT THE ISRAELIS SUFFERED FROM AN EXCESSIVE DEGREES OF OVERCONFIDENCE --- DERIVED FROM THEIR VICTORIES

IN JUNE 1967. THE TWO AUTHORS ALSO AGREE THAT ISRAEL HAD NEVER ADEQUATELY APPRECIATED THE EFFECT OF THAT WAR ON THE PRIDE, SELF-RESPECT, AND HONOR OF THE ARAB PEOPLE.

PROFESSOR LUTTWAK SEES THIS AS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO THE LACK OF READINESS DEMONSTRATED IN 1973 BY THE ISRAELI FRONTLINE FORCES ALONG THE CANAL AND IN THE GOLAN HEIGHTS. BUT HE SAYS THAT THE EGYPTIAN AND SYRIAN ATTACKING ARMIES FAILED TO FOLLOW UP ON THIS INITIAL ADVANTAGE --- THUS PERMITTING THE ISRAELIS TO MOVE TO THE OFFENSIVE, EARLY IN THE WAR.

IN THE PROCESS, HE SAYS, THE LOSS OF EQUIPMENT BY BOTH SIDES WAS UNPRECEDENTED. SYRIA AND HER ALLIES LEFT BEHIND MORE THAN ONE THOUSAND BATTLE TANKS IN THEIR RETREAT FROM THE GOLAN HEIGHTS. ISRAEL LOST MORE THAN ONE HUNDRED AIRCRAFT DURING THE WAR; THE ARABS LOST MORE THAN FOUR HUNDRED, EVEN THOUGH --- AS PROFESSOR LUTTWAK POINTS OUT --- THE EGYPTIAN AIR FORCE WAS NEVER FULLY COMMITTED TO BATTLE.

"THE INTENSITY OF DESTRUCTION OF THE WEAPONS AVAILABLE TO BOTH SIDES," WRITES GENERAL HERZOG, "TODAY CAN IN ITSELF ULTIMATELY ACT AS A DETERRENT IN THE MIDDLE EAST, PROVIDED THAT ISRAEL MAINTAINS A VERY HIGH STATE OF PREPAREDNESS WITH ALL OPTIONS OPEN. ANOTHER HOPEFUL FACTOR," HE SAYS, "IS THAT IN THE INITIAL SUCCESSES OF THE YOM KIPPUR WAR THE ARABS REGAINED THEIR NATIONAL HONOR, AND THIS MAY ULTIMATELY FACILITATE THE DEVELOPMENT OF A DIALOGUE AND NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO SIDES."

IN THE UNITED STATES, PENTAGON ANALYSTS HAVE CONCLUDED THAT THERE ARE SEVERAL MAJOR MILITARY LESSONS TO BE LEARNED FROM THE OCTOBER WAR. THESE INCLUDE THE IMPORTANCE OF ADVANCE WARNING AND ITS ASSESSMENT, AND THE READY FORCES TO TAKE

ADVANTAGE OF IT. SUCH FORCES SHOULD BE BALANCED AND MUTUALLY SUPPORTING --- NOT JUST TANKS AND AIRCRAFT, BUT INFANTRY, ANTI-TANK WEAPONS, ARTILLERY AND GROUND AIR DEFENSES, AS WELL. GIVEN THE HEAVY ATTRITION RATE OF EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLIES, U.S. OFFICIALS POINT TO THE IMPORTANCE OF A FUNCTIONING PRODUCTION BASE, AND SUFFICIENT RESERVE STOCKS OF AMMUNITION, SPARE PARTS AND EQUIPMENT.

THE WAR OF OCTOBER 1973 WAS BRIEF, IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER CONFLICTS, BUT IT CONTINUES TO BE ONE OF THE MOST STUDIED AND WRITTEN ABOUT MILITARY ACTIONS OF OUR TIME.

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